

online material selection

Regardless of whether your library's yearly budget is \$200 or \$20,000, one of the hardest administrative duties seems to be collection development. One would think that the selection of books would be effortless, especially with the number of online bookstores offering used book discounts or free shipping for large orders.

For teacher-librarians, the "virtual-ness" of online selection is very simple – log on, choose a book, check a review. And it seems that selecting books based upon bookstore reviews rather than the traditional print selection tools that we have been taught to use is becoming a significant trend. Although Amazon, Barnes and Noble and other online bookstores may not be considered a "primary" source for selection, they are being used as a secondary source for school library selection based upon the reviews, visual content and price information.

Deepening budget cuts and limited or untrained staff means collection development is demanding more of teacher-librarians' time. In addition, with online access to bookstores becoming commonplace, even teachers have begun using them to select materials. But when teachers offer book choices from such resources, do we compare their choices against other materials in our professional selection tools? Do we check for reviews? Do we suggest better titles based upon reviews in our selection tools?

A recent question posed to the online teacher-librarian discussion list LM_NET showed that a majority of teacher-librarians still use conventional library selection tools such as *Elementary school catalog*, *Middle and junior high school catalog* and *Senior high school catalog* as well as current professional journals to select materials for their libraries, but others rely on the online bookstore information as a secondary resource to evaluate the format (size, covers, etc.) if they had not seen the book. In addition, some stated they would often read bookstore customer reviews to make

final decisions before purchasing the book.

It is the online book review/selection aspect that seems of most concern. Although teacher-librarians who have access to the traditional library review resources use them as a primary source to determine what materials they might select, they often use the bookstore reviews to make their final decisions. But in that same poll, the reliability of those online reviews were questioned by those who had either investigated the reviews (those done by consumers who rave about a book but mysteriously seem to offer the same exact comments to other books) or librarian-authors who recognized that the online reviews for their books were actually intended for another author's work.

Due to tightened budgets, the difficult reality in selection for many teacher-librarians is the lack of access to print selection tools. Teacher-librarians who cannot afford the "luxury" of subscriptions to current professional journals or retrospective catalogs are instead utilizing reviews from various online sources in making material selection decisions.

While print selection tools remain the best resource, there are a variety of free online resources, better than bookstore reviews, that teacher-librarians can utilize to select appropriate materials for their library. Among those free resources are:

American Library Association (<http://www.ala.org>) provides librarians with specific "top picks" lists from their publications as well as a variety of booklists such as Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adults, Outstanding Books for the College Bound, and, of course, the Newbery and Caldecott Award winners.

Follett's Titlewave (<http://www.titlewave.com>) is accessible with free registration and does not require you to actually purchase your books from Follett. This resource often provides full reviews from a variety of professional journals. The service

also provides additional information such as reading level, grade level appropriateness and Dewey number.

Online professional resources for teachers such as Science Books and Films Online (<http://www.sbsonline.com>), National Council for Social Studies (<http://www.socialstudies.org/resources/notable>), National Science Teachers Association (<http://www.nsta.org/ostbc>) and the National Council for Teachers of English (<http://www.ncte.org>) offer "Best Books for the Year" lists. These resources provide reviews done by subject specialists and allow you to locate specific titles that you may have missed (as well as create opportunities for you to network with teachers of these subjects in your school during the selection process.)

Although these are only a few of the "free" online sources that offer professional review information, it is important to note that when selecting materials, the book review is important not only to begin the process but also to support the book if there is the possibility of a challenge. Even though accessing online book reviews make the book selection process easier, remember to evaluate the review thoroughly and determine your final selection based upon your library's selection policy and your community's standards.

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